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Georgia Southern University Athletics



Clay Helton Named Head Football Coach of Georgia Southern Eagles
New coach won 46 games, including Pac-12 and Rose Bowl championships, while at USC
Football
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STATESBORO - [Clay Helton](#), who led USC to a Rose Bowl title following the 2016 season and won a Pac-12 championship in 2017, has been named the 11th full-time head coach in the Georgia Southern modern football era, as announced Tuesday by Georgia Southern Director of Athletics [Jared Benko](#).

"I am very humbled to be named the head football coach at Georgia Southern University," Helton said. "Thank you to President Marrero, Athletic Director [Jared Benko](#), the search committee and the entire Georgia Southern family for this amazing opportunity. This football program represents a tradition of excellence spread over the past 40 years but has won six national championships and three bowl games in that short amount of time. The passion and love its alumni and fans have for the University are second to none. Georgia Southern has always prided itself on the highest levels of success, and I welcome those expectations. We will have a staff and a team representing the toughness, discipline and GATA mentality on which this program was founded. I cannot wait to get started to build a football program that is consistently winning championships and is the platinum standard of college football on a national scale."

The 49-year-old Helton went 46-24 (.657) as the head coach of the USC Trojans while leading them to three conference championship games and 12 victories over AP Top 25 teams, including three in the Top 5 and four in the Top 10. He went 5-1 in a pandemic-shortened 2020 season and was 8-5 in 2019 with wins over No. 23 Stanford and No. 10 Utah. Helton went 11-3 in 2017 with wins over No. 14 Stanford twice (including in the Pac-12 Championship Game) and No. 23 Arizona, and went 10-3 in 2016 with wins over No. 4 Washington, No. 5 Penn State in a legendary Rose Bowl thriller and No. 21 Colorado.

"What a great day for Eagle Nation with the announcement of [Clay Helton](#) as the new head coach of Georgia Southern football," Benko said. "Clay is renowned for not only his coaching abilities but for the person that he is. He's an elite offensive mind who has produced record-setting offenses and high NFL Draft picks everywhere he's coached. I've enjoyed getting to know Clay throughout this process, and I know he's committed like I am to the holistic development athletically, academically and socially of all of our student-athletes. He also takes great pride in producing men of character and future leaders. During this interview process, Clay demonstrated a thorough understanding of what it takes to be not only to be a head coach but to win at an elite level and he is the best choice to lead our football program here at Georgia Southern."

Helton was the first USC head coach to have 10-win seasons in each of his first two full seasons, and he had more wins (21) in his first two full seasons than any USC coach. He led USC to a 13-game winning streak from 2016 to 2017 and a 13-game winning streak over Power 5 opponents from 2016 to 2017.

After starting the 2015 season as the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach, Helton was named USC's permanent head coach for two post-season games on Nov. 30 of that year as the interim head coaching title that he had held since Oct. 12 (for USC's final seven regular-season games) was removed. Helton guided the 2015 Trojans to five wins in the final six regular-season games (including victories over No. 3 Utah and No. 22 UCLA), the co-championship of the challenging Pac-12 South Division, a berth in the Pac-12 Championship Game, and a trip to the Holiday Bowl. His 2016 team won a heart-stopping Rose Bowl over Penn State and his Trojans won the Pac-12 championship in 2017.

Helton joined the USC staff in February of 2010 as the quarterbacks coach after spending 10 seasons as an assistant at Memphis. He added the passing game coordinator role in 2012 and became the offensive coordinator in 2013. In 2013, he served as USC's interim head coach in its victory over Fresno State in the Las Vegas Bowl.

Helton began his 10-year (2000-09) Memphis career as the running backs coach for three seasons, then coached the Tigers' receivers for the next four seasons before becoming the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach for the final three years. He served as Memphis' interim head coach for several months in early 2006 when head coach Tommie West had off-season heart surgery. Among the Tigers' running backs he tutored was school rushing/scoring/all-purpose running record holder DeAngelo Williams, who finished seventh in the Heisman Trophy voting in 2005 and was an NFL first-round selection. As the receivers coach, he produced a pair of Conference USA All-Freshman picks in Maurice Jones (2005) and Duke Calhoun (2006) and the school's No. 4 all-time receptions leader in Ryan Scott. As the Tigers' offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach, the 2007 and 2008 offenses were among the top six in school history in total yards and points. During Helton's time, Memphis played in five bowls: the 2003 and 2007 New Orleans Bowls, 2004 GMAC Bowl, 2005 Motor City Bowl, and 2008 St. Petersburg Bowl.

Before Memphis, he was the running backs coach at Houston, his alma mater, for three seasons (1997-99), working under his father, head coach Kim Helton. He began his coaching career at Duke, serving as a graduate assistant in 1995 and then the running backs coach in 1996.

Helton played quarterback at Houston in 1993 and 1994, playing for his father both seasons and captaining the Cougars as a 1994 senior. He spent 1991 and 1992 at Auburn, where he earned 1992 SEC All-Academic honors. He redshirted there in 1990. Helton earned his bachelor's degree in mathematics and interdisciplinary science from Houston in 1994 and prepped at Clements High in Sugar Land, Texas.

Helton and his wife, Angela, have three children: sons Reid and Turner and daughter Aubrey. Besides being Houston's head coach from 1993 to 1999, his father, Kim, was an assistant in college (Florida, Miami, and Alabama Birmingham), the NFL (Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Houston Oilers, Los Angeles Raiders, Washington Redskins), and the CFL (Toronto Argonauts) following his playing career at Florida. His brother, Tyson, was the quarterbacks coach and pass game coordinator at USC (2016-17) until becoming Tennessee's offensive coordinator in 2018 and is now the head coach at Western Kentucky.

THE HELTON FILE

Career Record: 46-24 (Five Full Seasons); includes two stints as interim head coach and 2021 season

2013: USC - Offensive Coordinator/Quarterbacks * (Las Vegas Bowl Champs)
2015: USC - Offensive Coordinator/Quarterbacks/Head Coach # (Holiday Bowl)
2016: USC - Head Coach (10-3; Rose Bowl Champs)
2017: USC - Head Coach (11-3; Cotton Bowl)
2018: USC - Head Coach (5-7)
2019: USC - Head Coach (8-5; Holiday Bowl)
2020: USC - Head Coach (5-1)
2021: USC - Head Coach (1-1)

* - 1-0 as USC's interim head coach for the Las Vegas Bowl

- 5-2 as USC's interim head coach for final seven games of regular season and 0-2 as permanent head coach in postseason

Personal

Born: June 24, 1972 in Gainesville, Fla.

College: Houston (1994; mathematics and interdisciplinary science)

Family: wife, Angela; sons, Reid and Turner; daughter, Aubrey

Accomplishments and Honors

Pac-12 Championship (2017)

3x Pac-12 South Division (2015, 2017, 2020)

Rose Bowl Champions (2016)
2017 AP Pac-12 Coach of the Year
2x Paul "Bear" Bryant Coach of the Year Award Finalist
2016 Football Writers First Year Co-Coach of the Year Award

Prominent Pupils

Sam Darnold (QB; 1st round draft pick [3rd overall] - New York Jets; 2018)
Alijah-Vera Tucker (OL; 1st round draft pick [14th overall] - New York Jets; 2021)
Adoreé Jackson (CB; 1st round pick [18th overall] - Tennessee Titans; 2017)
Austin Jackson (OL; 1st round pick [18th overall] - Miami Dolphins; 2020)
DeAngelo Williams (RB; 1st round draft pick [27th overall] - Carolina Panthers; 2006)
Ronald Jones II (RB; 2nd round draft pick - Tampa Bay Buccaneers; 2018)
Uchenna Nwosu (LB; 2nd round draft pick - Los Angeles Chargers; 2018)
Michael Pittman Jr. (WR; 2nd round draft pick - Indianapolis Colts; 2020)
JuJu Smith-Schuster (WR; 2nd round draft pick - Pittsburgh Steelers; 2017)
Rasheem Green (DL; 3rd round draft pick - Seattle Seahawks; 2018)
Cody Kessler (QB; 3rd round draft pick - Cleveland Browns; 2016)
Matt Barkley (QB; 4th round draft pick - Philadelphia Eagles; 2013)
Amon-Ra St. Brown (WR; 4th round draft pick - Detroit Lions; 2021)
Jay Tufele (DL; 4th round draft pick - Jacksonville Jaguars; 2021)
Talanoa Hufanga (S; 5th round draft pick - San Francisco 49ers; 2021)
Cameron Smith (LB; 5th round draft pick - Minnesota Vikings; 2019)
Marvell Tell III (CB; 5th round draft pick - Indianapolis Colts; 2019)

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